

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Armagh Robinson Library Collections

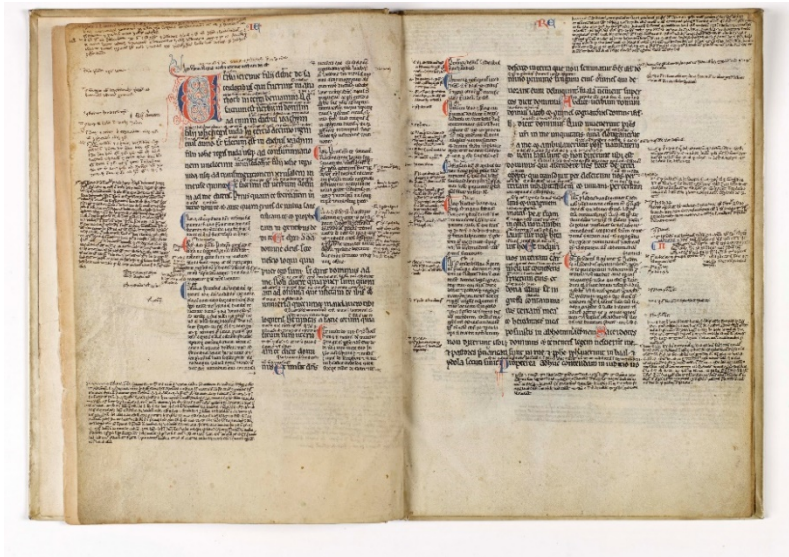
Armagh Robinson Library is a rare survivor of the physical expression of eighteenth century scholarship. With the Library of Trinity College, and Marsh's Library, also in Dublin, it is one of three most important heritage libraries in Ireland.

In 1771 Archbishop Richard Robinson founded and endowed at his own cost a public library in Armagh. He commissioned the design of the building from Thomas Cooley in 1770. It was his first public building in Armagh, the first instalment of a master-plan to restore a city which had suffered badly from centuries of wars and neglect. The Library stands on the Hill in the centre and oldest part of Armagh. The Library building is of significant community and heritage value for Armagh and Northern Ireland as it still survives and is in use for its original purpose. It is now Grade A listed, but needs major renovation.



The Library's collections currently consist of 42,251 printed works: books, pamphlets and periodicals. There are 36,000 books, the earliest one printed in 1484, 307 manuscripts, of which 15 are from the 12th – 13th century, and 9 from the 15th century. The Library also has a rare intact collection of 4,500 17th/18th century prints; 17th century Louis XIV cast medals; 18th century Tassie engraved sulphur gems; over 400 Roman coins and 130 post-Roman coins; the Cathedral's music collection and 242 antiquities. The following pages show some of the highlights as examples of the richness of the collection and to illustrate the importance of preserving and conserving the collections in context for future generations.

Manuscripts and Incunabula



The earliest manuscripts date from the late twelfth century. Four of these volumes contain inscriptions showing that they had originally belonged to the medieval library in the Cistercian abbey of Notre Dame at Pontigny, near Auxerre. There are also seven Incunabula (books printed before 1501), dating from the second half of the fifteenth century.

Archbishop Robinson's Personal Library

The nucleus of the collection is Archbishop Robinson's personal library. This includes a significant collection of Archbishop James Ussher's works and works by Archbishop Robinson's contemporaries, the founders of Methodism, John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield. The favoured authors of his day James Boswell, Samuel Johnson, Henry Fielding and Edward Gibbon are also represented.



Early Books on Science



Archbishop Robinson was also interested in science and medicine. There is a very significant collection of Robert Boyle's books and discoveries. Boyle (1627-1691) is often referred to as a polymath but is best known as the father of modern chemistry. The collection also includes books by John Wilkins (1614-72) one of the founders of the Royal Society, and Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), theologian and scientist who discovered oxygen.

The Library has the earliest books on natural history in Ireland, early herbals and botany books with beautifully hand-painted illustrations.

Exploration, Maps and Atlases

The Archbishop's collection includes many books relating to exploration, such as Sir Walter Raleigh's *The Discovery of Guiana*, 1600, and his *History of the World*, 1614, Fynes Moryson's *Travels*, 1617; *The Voyages and Adventures of Captain Robert Boyle*, 1741, Captain Cook's *A Voyage towards the South Pole, and Round the World* in two volumes, 1777, and an account of the ill-fated third voyage, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*, together with maps and atlases, 38 of which date from the seventeenth century.



Second Viscount Conway's Surviving Collection



This surviving collection is of international significance

The Library contains the surviving books from the Second Viscount Conway's seventeenth century library at Lisnagarvey. According to Dr Daniel Starza Smith, in his book 'John Donne and the Conway Papers: Patronage and Manuscript Circulation in the Early Seventeenth Century', Conway was among the foremost private book collectors of his time. Conway's library was burnt by rebels in 1640s. Among this surviving collection are three books signed by his friends, the poet John Donne, and the dramatist Ben Jonson.

Rare Architectural Books



Dr Edward MacParland, Pro-Chancellor of Trinity College, Dublin, has recently discovered that the Library also contains the book collection of Sir Thomas Robinson, 1st Baronet Rokeby (1703–1777), who was a politician, architect and collector. Thomas left his books to his brother, the Archbishop, on his death in 1777.

This collection, which was thought to have been lost, contains many rare and valuable architectural books, including work by Inigo Jones, Christopher Wren, Halfpenny and Decker.

Jonathan Swift

One of the most famous books in the collection is a first edition of *Gulliver's Travels* by Dean Jonathan Swift, dated 28 October 1726, and published by Benjamin Motte. This copy carries amendments in Swift's own handwriting.



Print Collection



The Library holds an impressive collection of over 4,450 prints, both bound in volumes and as individual sheets, including Robinson's own large collection of important and rare engravings known as the 'Rokeby Collection'. The collection comprises fifteenth to nineteenth century prints, notably those by Vouet, Mellan, Goltzius, Hogarth, Piranesi, Bartolozzi and the Sadeler family.

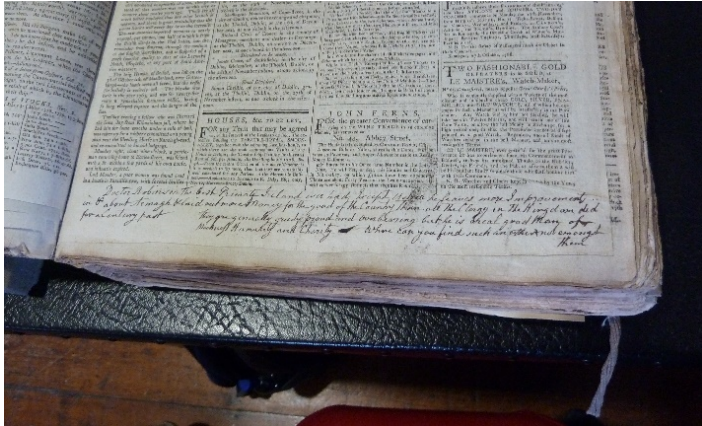
Elenor Ling, from the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and Nicholas Stogdon, an authority on eighteenth-century prints, visited the Library in November 2016. They stated that the collection is a very rare example of an 18th-century print collection, in institutional hands, which is apparently intact.

It is also unique in one very significant respect: for, unlike those in the other surviving early collections in Great Britain and Ireland, the prints were for the most part never bound into albums, and can therefore be exhibited freely in many contexts and under various headings.



18th Century Newspapers

The Library has six volumes of rare 18th century newspapers covering a ten-year period, which were compiled by Henry Irwin. The volumes have been reviewed by Dr Michael O'Connor, of Queen's University Belfast. He regards them as an unknown and very rare resource.



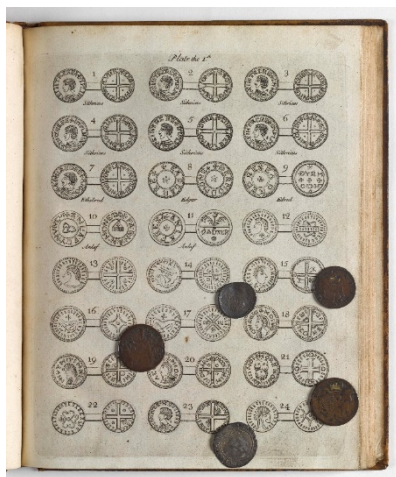
The volumes include whole years of newspapers, with annotations by the collector. Irwin's annotations throughout the collection provide a unique insight into one contemporary reader's response to significant national and international events. For example, he comments on the mental health of King George III, the French Revolution, the fall of the Bastille and other pertinent news items of the late eighteenth century.

Tassie Gems



Professor Tim Wilks, of Southampton Solent University, has identified the Library's gems as a rare complete collection of the 'impressions' produced by James Tassie (1735–1799). The collection consists of 3,246 gems made from sulphur paste which correspond with the Library's first edition of the catalogue that accompanied this collection, *A Catalogue of Impressions in Sulphur of Antique and Modern Gems From Which Pastes are Made and Sold*, by J. Tassie, 1775. The height of Tassie's success came when a complete collection was ordered by Catherine the Great of Russia in 1781. There are few complete collections of his work. Those still extant are held in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, and the Hermitage, St Petersburg.

Coins



Richard Abdy, of the British Museum, has described the Robinson coin collection as 'fairly substantial for a private collection as would befit a learned gentleman of the day, who would have been versed in the Classics'. The collection includes of over 400 Roman, and over 100 medieval Coins.

Accompanying the collection of coins are some 40 reference books, including a beautiful bound copy of *Commentariorum In Vetera Imperatorum Numismata Libri Primus*, 1562, Venice.

Louis XIV Medals



The Collection includes a rare and unusual collection of 109 70mm sulphur casts of Louis XIV medals, made to celebrate his reign. They are housed in their original seventeenth century wooden boxes. These are very fine sulphur copies made between 1689-97, struck from the original medals attributed to Michael Molart and Jerome Roussel. The Library also holds a first edition of *Médailles sur les Principaux Événements du Règne de Louis le Grand* (Medallic History of Louis the Great), 1702, which may have been collected with the medals.

Antiquities

The collection of 242 antiquities bequeathed by Archbishop Marcus Gervais Beresford includes numerous and standard examples of well-known prehistoric types.

